

Division Opinion

Inquiry: 2008-08

Subject: Minimum Size Replacement Windows

Code: 2006 International Residential Code
2007 Minnesota State Building Code chapter 1309

Submitted By: 10,000 Lakes Chapter of the International Code Council
Uniformity of Inspections Committee

Approved By: Thomas Anderson, State Building Official

Issue Date: Aug. 1, 2008

Question: Should the building codes require an absolute minimum size for a replacement window?

Answer: No. To date, the IRC Committee has not suggested that a minimum size should be required. The replacement window provisions added by amendment in Minnesota Rule Chapter 1309, Section R310.1.5 were to encourage people to replace windows in sleeping rooms with functioning window units.

Background Information: Replacement window provisions were first introduced with the adoption of the 2000 International Residential Code (IRC) on March 31, 2003. These provisions were added by amendment as referenced in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1309, Section R310.1.5. The replacement window provisions were also incorporated by amendment when adopting the 2006 IRC with minor revisions to encourage uniform enforcement.

Many existing dwellings have sleeping room windows that have been rendered inoperable for a variety of reasons making them unusable in the event of an emergency. Minnesota recognized a uniform enforcement concern related to replacement windows not addressed within the IRC model code language. Window units are commonly replaced with either: new window units, replacing existing sash units or installing window insert units. The installation of window insert units may reduce the open area of the existing window since they are typically installed within the existing window jambs.

Discussion:

The new text states replacement windows shall be the “manufacture’s largest standard size window that will fit within the existing frame or existing rough opening”. This language should alleviate the owner from having to order a custom size window unless it’s by their choice.

The new text also notes that “the replacement window shall be permitted to be of the same operating style as the existing window or a style that provides for a greater window opening area than the existing window”. In short, this means that the replacement window can be a casement unit for a casement unit or a double-hung unit for a double-hung unit. The text also will allow a casement unit to be used in an existing double-hung unit opening if it provides a greater opening area.

It should be noted that a replacement casement window unit must have the same type of operating hardware permitting the maximum window opening. Some casement units have operating hardware located at other than near the jamb for ease in cleaning, but can severely reduce the opening width. It was not intended to replace a casement window unit with another having hardware that greatly reduces the opening width. Likewise, when replacing a double-hung window unit with a double-hung unit it is anticipated that both of the sash units are of equal size, unless the existing double-hung window has unequal sash.